

# GENERATIONAL PATTERNS OF DIGITAL NEWS CONSUMPTION: FROM TRADITIONALISTS TO MILLENNIAL MINIMALISTS

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**ABSTRACT** *Digital high-choice media environments (Prior, 2007; Van Aelst et al., 2017) lead to fragmented and polarized news consumption. The concept of news repertoires was introduced to analyze media use in a cross-media environment. News repertoires were found to be diverse across countries, to be dependent on age groups, socioeconomic status, and to have effects on political knowledge and participation (Diehl et al., 2018; Edgerly et al., 2018; Strömbäck et al., 2018; Wolfsfeld et al., 2016). The aim of this study is to identify different news repertoires in Croatia and to test the effects of generational belonging and socioeconomic status on the formation of these repertoires. It has been shown over time that age and political interest are more important predictors of increasingly diversified and polarized news consumption (Bergström et al., 2019; Strömbäck et al., 2013). This study discusses the interplay of socio-demographic factors and political interest in driving news consumption across different generations. The analysis is based on data from Reuters Digital News Survey conducted in Croatia in 2018. Latent class analysis is used to identify news repertoires and the covariates which form them. The analysis resulted in identifying five news repertoires: minimalists, digital-born users, traditionalists, commercial media users and eclectics.*

## KEYWORDS

AUDIENCE, FRAGMENTATION, NEWS REPERTOIRES, GENERATIONS, POLITICAL INTEREST

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## INTRODUCTION

Various models of democracy share assumptions of the role of media and citizen involvement in the political process. Liberal democracies expect that the media serve as a citizen forum which promotes debate on issues of public interest, as a watchdog against misuse of power, and a mobilization agent encouraging citizen learning and participation (Norris, 2000: 23-24). Although different models of democracy assume different expectations regarding news, even those which require the least engagement in the public sphere still emphasize the importance of news consumption. For example, Michael Shudson's model of monitorial citizen and John Zaller's idea of media functioning as burglar alarm assume that citizens dedicate most of their time to their private lives (explained in Strömbäck, 2005). Politics is in these models left to professional politicians, while media are there to alarm citizens only when things go wrong. Unlike this minimal view of democracy, other models expect more involvement and responsibility from citizens and media in influencing politics and making democracy work (Strömbäck, 2005). How can these expectations be fulfilled in contemporary media environments?

Contemporary media environments are described as high-choice media environments which influence structures and flows of political communication (Prior, 2007; Van Aelst *et al.*, 2017). The changes brought by these systems are discussed in terms of concern over less supply of political information, lower quality of news, higher media concentration, lower diversity of media content, fragmentation and polarization of media audiences, increasing relativism and higher inequalities in political knowledge (Prior, 2007; Van Aelst *et al.*, 2017). Audiences become more fragmented and polarized and consume news in line with their political attitudes. Current media systems offer more possibilities to avoid news and in the same time allow for highly interested news seekers to enjoy higher quality information, which has implications for political participation (Prior, 2007; Van Aelst *et al.*, 2017). However, at the same time audiences mostly rely on mainstream media for news (Nielsen *et al.*, 2019) and consume information inconsistent with their views (Van Aelst *et al.*, 2017,) or are incidentally exposed to various information (Fletcher and Nielsen, 2018). There is a larger share of disinformation, but no evidence of higher audience demand for this (Nelson and Tadeja, 2018; van Aelst *et al.*, 2017).

## DYNAMICS AND EFFECTS OF NEWS CONSUMPTION

The latest *Digital News Report* by the *Reuters Institute* (Nielsen *et al.*, 2019) demonstrates the dominance of television and digital news which are increasingly consumed on mobile devices and through various platforms. Audiences have more choice in news, but tend to trust media less, and are more concerned about misinformation (Nielsen *et al.*, 2019). The relationship between news consumption and citizenship is framed through media malaise or virtuous circle approach. The media malaise approach (and the *spiral of cynicism*) posits that exposure to media results in political cynicism and lower trust towards political institutions, which draws citizens away from politics (Delli Carpini, 2004). According to

the virtuous circle approach, engaged citizens will follow news and have higher political knowledge, which will sustain their political interest and motivate them for further political engagement (Norris, 2000). Television news might encourage deeper psychological involvement with political issues, teach about politics and have a democratizing effect for audiences with lower education or political interest (Delli Carpini, 2004). Newspapers offer deeper and broader analysis of political events but are more commonly read by audiences of higher socio-economic status (Delli Carpini, 2004). The networked and interactive nature of digital media allows its users a more active relationship with news. Contemporary political communication research has identified mostly positive effects of digital and social media on political participation (Boulianne, 2015, 2009; Dimitrova *et al.*, 2014; Strömbäck *et al.*, 2018; Skoric *et al.*, 2016; Gil de Zúñiga *et al.*, 2012). However, social media have some shortcomings, such as limited effect on political knowledge (Dimitrova *et al.*, 2014). Although social media provoked concerns over news audiences closing in 'filter bubbles' based on their own personal preferences and social networks (Pariser, 2011), research discovered that social media have a wide potential of incidentally exposing audiences to diverse sources of news (Fletcher and Nielsen, 2018).

News consumption is shaped by various factors on the individual and structural level (Bergström *et al.*, 2019; Blekesaune *et al.*, 2012). Comparative research finds that citizens with higher socioeconomic status and those with higher interest in news and politics tend to be more engaged with news (Blekesaune *et al.*, 2012; Shehata, 2010; Shehata and Strömbäck, 2011). Environments with higher media supply place more value to audience selection and preferences, which makes political interest more important in news selection (Prior, 2007; Strömbäck *et al.*, 2013). This allows audiences to take advantage of increased news supply, while those with less interest tend to tune out (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2013: 431). Incidental exposure to news could have a weak potential of bridging the gap between news and entertainment seekers (Kim *et al.*, 2013). With time, age has become a more important predictor in news choice, as well as socioeconomic status for certain types of news (Bergström *et al.*, 2019). Trust in news and media also influences news choices.<sup>1</sup> Lower trust drives media choice to alternative, non-mainstream news sources, and to social media which expose audiences to a more diverse set of news brands (Kalogeropoulos *et al.*, 2019). Latest research demonstrates decreasing trust across different media systems, connected with the rising concern over misinformation (Kalogeropoulos *et al.*, 2019). Media literacy is also an important aspect of news consumption, and it can motivate users to become more politically engaged in the digital sphere and to be exposed to more diverse information and worldviews (Kahne *et al.*, 2012).

<sup>1</sup> It is normatively expected that news trust in democratic media systems with a high level of media independence positively affects informed political choice (Kalogeropoulos *et al.*, 2019). However, lower trust in news might be a sign of 'healthy skepticism' towards information sources (Tsfati and Ariely, 2013: 775), especially in countries with higher political instrumentalization of media.

## NEWS REPERTOIRES IN HIGH-CHOICE MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS

Recent studies started to include various measures of multi-media use to analyze news consumption in high-choice media environments, like 'media or news repertoires', 'media diet' or 'multi-platform news use' (Diehl *et al.*, 2018; Hasebrink and Domeyer, 2012). Media repertoires are defined as "entirety of media that a person regularly uses" and that these repertoires are recognized as „relatively stable trans-media patterns of media use" (Hasebrink and Domeyer, 2012: 759).

More emerging research is dedicated to news repertoires. In Asia, repertoires of 'news avoiders', 'new media news users', and 'traditional news users' are found in South Korea (Lee and Yang, 2014), while Chinese audiences usually combine traditional and digital media (Yuan, 2011). Stephanie Edgerly (2015) identifies six news repertoires among American audiences: 'news avoiders', 'Internet users', 'television and press audiences', 'liberal online audiences', 'conservative audiences' and 'news omnivores'. Another study traces news repertoires among young citizens in the USA: 'news avoiders', 'curated news only', 'traditional news only' and 'news omnivores' repertoires (Edgerly *et al.*, 2018). In Israel, 'traditional', 'eclectic', 'social media' and 'news avoiders' repertoires are identified (Wolfsfeld *et al.*, 2016). In Northern Europe, Dutch audience fragments into 'minimalists', 'public news consumers', 'popular news consumers' and 'omnivores' (Bos *et al.*, 2016). The largest repertoire in Sweden is that of low news use, labeled 'minimalist' (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2018). Research in Croatia establishes that traditional media play an important role in Croatian media repertoires (Peruško *et al.*, 2017) and that a richer news repertoire positively influences digital political participation (Vozab, 2016).

Although analysis of news repertoires has been done in different media systems, on different samples, using diverse ways of operationalization and various statistical techniques in distinguishing groups of users, certain patterns of repertoires can be noticed. Most research discovered users who have an overall low news use. These users are labeled as either 'news avoiders' or 'minimal media users' and tend to be the largest group of consumers.<sup>2</sup> 'Traditional media users', 'digital media users' and 'omnivore' or 'eclectic users' are also found in different media environments. Age, education and political interest proved to be important in distinguishing different groups of news consumers (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2018). The effects of news repertoires are also found. Traditional news users and those with more news in their repertoire tend to be more politically knowledgeable, have a higher political efficacy and participate more (Lee and Yang, 2014; Wolfsfeld *et al.*, 2016). Social media repertoire is linked with political participation, but the correlation with political knowledge is ambiguous (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2018; Wolfsfeld *et al.*, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Depending on the author, users who were found – either by cluster analysis, latent class analysis or another method – to have a low use of different news sources were labeled either 'news avoiders' or 'minimalists'. These categories are certain methodological constructs and differ depending on the sample, method and questionnaire used in the analysis. The term 'news avoiders' does not necessarily refer to those who actively avoid news. For example, in Hyunwoo Lee and Jungae Yang (2014) and Edgerly *et al.* (2018) research, they are defined as those who have a lower than total mean media use across all the examined platforms. Linda Bos *et al.* (2016) define 'minimalists' as those who use news the least. However, the authors acknowledge that this label does not refer to audiences that completely or actively avoid news.

## GENERATIONAL PATTERNS OF NEWS CONSUMPTION

Patterns of news consumption are formed through socialization at a young age (Lee *et al.*, 2013; York and Scholl, 2015). Family relations, parent characteristics, schools, peer groups and political and media environment shape habits of news consumption during the socialization period (Čuvalo and Peruško, 2017; Diehl *et al.*, 2018; Lee *et al.*, 2013; York and Scholl, 2015). Behavior and practices accepted during the formative years in childhood and adolescence are likely to persist throughout one's adult life (Čuvalo and Peruško, 2017; York and Scholl, 2015). Comparative research shows gaps and different patterns in news consumption between different age cohorts. Older-age groups tend to prefer traditional media as sources of news, mostly television (Kalogeropoulos, 2019). Younger generations rely mostly on digital news sources, social media and messaging applications, valuing video formats. Moreover, they are less occupied with news brands, often leaving news selection to algorithmic recommendation and personalization systems (Kalogeropoulos, 2019). They are found to be more often disconnected from news (Blekesaune *et al.*, 2012), and are more likely to get in contact with news incidentally, in an unstructured and superficial way, thanks to their constant immersion in social media (Boczkowski *et al.*, 2017).

'Generation' is a useful sociological concept for explaining such different patterns in news consumption. Media and communication scholars commonly use Karl Mannheim's concept of generation, which is defined as a social construct pointing to age cohorts which share similar social and historical experience, which is reflected in their values and habits (Bolin, 2016; Čuvalo and Peruško, 2017; Diehl *et al.*, 2018). Karl Mannheim distinguishes three main factors for delineating generations: "(1) sudden social changes (for example war, revolution, a sociocultural flow, etc.) that the individual has experienced at a tender age, (2) generational self-awareness arising from these social changes and (3) the common aspiration for specific ideals." (in Opermann, 2014: 45). Generational groups are therefore different in the USA (Bennett *et al.* 2009; Zukin *et al.*, 2006), Estonia (Opermann, 2014) or Sweden (Bolin, 2016), but certain generational patterns can be identified, *e.g.*, across Europe (Aroldi and Colombo, 2007). Media generations are, on the other hand, defined as age cohorts socialized with a certain set of media technologies, or in a certain media landscape (Bolin, 2016; Čuvalo and Peruško, 2017). In Croatia, the oldest, traditional media generations are followed by digital immigrants, while the youngest cohorts of digital users are divided into those who follow news and those who do not (Čuvalo and Peruško, 2017).

Besides this analysis, there are no other empirical analyses found which defined generational groups in Croatia. For this reason, it is a challenge to choose among different approaches to conceptualization and measurement of generations. Defining a 'Mannheimian' generation in the Croatian context would require a separate conceptual or empirical study like the one conducted, for example, in Estonia, which defined five specific generational cohorts (Oppermann, 2014). This analysis borrowed operationalization of generations as chronological age cohorts (from Diehl *et al.*, 2018, similar are discussed in Aroldi and Colombo, 2007 and used in Westlund and Weibull, 2013, and Zukin *et al.*,

2006). 'Dutiful citizens' are those born before 1946 and have memories of World War II as a great historical disruptive event. 'Baby boomers' were born between 1946 and 1964 and their generation is marked by post-war economic development and accompanying social changes. 'Generation X' refers to citizens born between 1965 and 1983, who experienced the transition from the television age to the Internet age. The youngest generation, 'Millennials', have been born from 1984 to present time. This generation has been socialized in a media-rich environment, with the Internet and digital technologies. This kind of operationalization is used in social research in different sociocultural contexts and often in marketing research and in media (Aroldi and Colombo, 2007; Diehl *et al.*, 2018; Westlund and Weibull, 2013; Zukin *et al.* 2006). This categorization follows the events which were important in different contexts - World War II, the subsequent economic growth and social changes, and the introduction of new media technologies. However, one can ask what American and Croatian Millennials have in common, and whether people born over a time span of twenty or thirty years can really share a common generational experience? Using this kind of operationalization is criticized as being superficial, defining generation primarily through age, assuming that groups of people born in such large spans of time share something in common, and referring mainly to American experience, disregarding geographical differences (Aroldi and Colombo, 2007; Westlund and Weibull, 2013). The choice of this kind of operationalization is a shortcoming of this research, and one can say that the concept of generation is used here more as a heuristic notion, rather than it provides a more nuanced generational analysis. Nevertheless, in the absence of other available categories specific for the Croatian society, this widely used categorization is adopted.

W. Lance Bennett *et al.* (2009) suggest two main types of citizenship divided across generational lines. 'Dutiful citizens' feel a sense of duty towards the Government; they vote, trust media and follow news. 'Actualizing citizens' are critical towards the Government and institutions, engage in protest and lifestyle politics, and follow digital media (Bennett *et al.*, 2009: 107). 'Millennials' are found to engage in news consumption by following multiple platforms, "snacking" news as "information is consumed in smaller amounts through a variety of technical modalities" (Diehl *et al.*, 2018: 16). Newer research confirms generational changes in news consumption and political engagement – multi-platform use and digital media relate to youth civic engagement (Diehl *et al.*, 2018; Lee *et al.*, 2013).

## METHODOLOGY, DATA AND SAMPLE

The main aim of the analysis is descriptive and explanatory. In the first step, it will compare three generational groups, 'Millennials', 'Generation X' and 'Baby boomers' in their attitudes towards news and sources they use for news consumption. The first part of the analysis will be done with descriptive statistics in SPSS, and statistical significance of differences between groups will be confirmed with ANOVA and Chi-square tests. The second step of the analysis uses latent class analysis to explore the types and structure

of news repertoires of digital news audiences. Based on the presented theoretical framework, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

*RQ1: What are the differences in news consumption between the three generations of media users?*

*RQ2: What types of news repertoires can be identified?*

*RQ2: What is the structure of news repertoires in terms of socio-demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of audiences?*

The analysis is based on data from the *Reuters Digital News Survey* of 2018 (commissioned by the *Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism*).<sup>3</sup> The online survey was conducted by *YouGov* at the end of January and at the beginning of February 2018. As the aim of the study was to analyze news consumption, the authors of the survey filtered out respondents who said that they had not consumed any news in the past month. Sample size is 2010, which is representative of the population of Internet users in Croatia. Gender groups are evenly distributed in the sample (49,7% male and 50,3% female). The average age in the sample is  $M=45,33$ . Most of the respondents in the sample come from Continental Croatia (28,5%) and the city of Zagreb (20,8%). Most of them completed secondary or high school (44,2%), have yearly income from 10000 to 19999 HRK (14,2%) and declare themselves to be politically in the center (20%).<sup>4</sup> As data refer only to Internet users who consumed at least some news in the past month, they might be skewed in comparison to the general population, representing younger cohorts of citizens with higher socioeconomic status and with higher political interest. Internet penetration has risen in Croatia – in 2018, 82% of households had access to the Internet, in comparison to 2013 when only 65% of households had Internet access (Eurostat, 2018).

## MEASURES

The following variables are used in two steps of the analysis:

*Gender*: A dichotomous variable with values: 1 = male; 2 = female.

*Generations*. 'Dutiful citizens' were born before 1946 (in this sample citizens who are 73 and older); 'Baby boomers' between 1946 and 1964 (in this sample those between the ages of 54 and 72); and 'Generation X' between 1965 and 1983 (between the ages of 35 and 53). 'Millennials' have been born from 1984 to present time (the age of 34 and younger). In the sample there were only twelve respondents belonging to 'dutiful citizens', so they were merged with 'Baby boomers', representing the oldest generation of users.

<sup>3</sup> For detailed explanation of *Digital News Survey* methodology and limitations, see: <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/survey-methodology-2018/>

<sup>4</sup> Survey data from the *Ivo Pilar Institute for Social Science*, collected in 2016 (N=750), show that 24,9% of the respondents position themselves in the political center, 20,9% as politically left-wing, 37,8% as politically right-wing, and 16,2% did not give an answer (source: <http://barometar.pilar.hr/rezultati-2016/politi%C4%8Dke-orijentacije-i-izbor/osnovne-orijentacije.html>). Duško Sekulić (2016) confirms a strong domination of political center in self-reported answers from survey respondents from 2006 to 2014.

*Income.* A variable with an eighteen-value scale ranging from 1 (less than 10000 Croatian Kuna, or HRK a year), to 9 (80000 to 89999 HRK a year) to 18 (500000 HRK and more) with the question: "What is the total amount of income of your household from all sources?" The answer "Don't know / Don't want to answer" was recoded as system missing ( $M=7,16$ ,  $SD=4,67$ ).

*Education:* An eight-value scale with the question "What is your highest level of education?" with answers on the scale ranging from 1 ("I am currently in school / full-time education") to 6 (Masters or Doctoral degree) ( $M=3,92$ ,  $SD=1,37$ ).

*Political leaning.* A variable on a six-value scale ranging from 1 (Very left-wing) to 6 (Very right-wing). Value 4 denotes political center ( $M=3,46$ ,  $SD=1,63$ ).

*News access.* The question was posed as "Typically, how often do you access news? By news we mean national, international, regional/local news and other topical events accessed via any platform". The variable is in a ten-point scale, from 1 (Never) to 5 (2-3 days a week) to 10 (More than 10 times a day) ( $M=8,02$ ,  $SD=1,4$ ).

*Interest in news.* The question was posed as "How, if at all, would you say you are interested in news?" ( $M=3,6$ ,  $SD=0,81$ ). The variable has a five-value scale: from 1 (Not at all interested), to 3 (Somewhat interested), to 5 (Extremely interested).

*Interest in news about politics.* A variable with a five-value scale: 1 (Not at all interested), to 3 (Somewhat interested), to 5 (Extremely interested), with the question "How, if at all, would you say you are interested in news about politics?" ( $M=3,06$ ,  $SD=1,01$ ).

*News trust.* Operationalized with a five-scale variable from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). "We will ask you about how much you trust the news as a whole in your country. Indicate your level of agreement." ( $M=3$ ,  $SD=1,03$ ).

*Concern about fake news.* Respondents were offered the following statement: "Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the Internet.". They reported their level of agreement on a five-point scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree) ( $M=3,40$ ,  $SD=1,04$ ).

*News literacy.* Constructed as a composite index based on correct answers to the following questions: "1) Which of the following news outlets does NOT depend primarily on advertising for financial support? 2) Which of the following is typically responsible for writing a press release? 3) How are most individual decisions about what news stories to show people on Facebook made?". The final composite variable ranges from value 0 (none of the questions were answered correctly) to 3 (all were answered correctly) ( $M=2,03$ ,  $SD=0,93$ ).

*News repertoires* are based on twenty-six dichotomous categories (the answer to the question "Which, if any, of the following have you used to access news in the last week?").



Respondents were able to choose between different traditional and digital media brands and social media. The news sources included in the analysis had at least 12% of audiences, and the two top social media were also included (the entire list of news sources is listed in Table 4.).

## ASPECTS OF NEWS CONSUMPTION ACROSS GENERATIONS

The differences in attitudes about news between three generations are shown in Table 1. ANOVA test found that generations differ significantly in frequency of access to news ( $F(2,1999)=4,6$ ,  $p < .05$ ), interest in news ( $F(2,2003)=7,6$ ,  $p < .01$ ), interest in political news ( $F(2,2002)=44,93$ ,  $p < .001$ ), concern about fake news ( $F(2,2007)=5,24$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and news literacy ( $F(2,2007)=5,54$ ,  $p < .01$ ). However, the three generations do not differ significantly in different aspects of news consumption. On average, audiences access news between two and five times a day and are to a certain extent interested in news. Millennial audiences access news slightly less and are less interested in news and news about politics. They have lower trust in news. They express a slightly higher concern about fake news, but they also score lower in news literacy compared to Generation X.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations. News consumption across three generations

	News access	Interest in news	Interest in political news	News trust	Concern about fake news	News Literacy
Millennials						
M (SD)	7,89 (1,65)	3,49 (0,89)	2,78 (1,1)	2,94 (1,07)	3,5 (1,09)	2,05 (0,99)
Generation X						
M (SD)	8,13 (1,41)	3,65 (0,79)	3,05 (0,99)	3,04 (1,03)	3,31 (1,05)	2,12 (0,96)
Baby boomers and older						
M (SD)	8,01 (1,2)	3,64 (0,76)	3,29 (0,91)	3,02 (0,99)	3,39 (0,99)	1,95 (0,87)
Total						
M (SD)	8,02 (1,41)	3,60 (0,81)	3,07 (1,01)	3,00 (1,03)	3,40 (1,04)	2,03 (0,93)

Generational cohorts differ in main sources of news consumption. Millennials use television ( $\chi^2=27,35$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p < .001$ ), radio ( $\chi^2=28,18$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and digital-born news ( $\chi^2=23,1$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p < .001$ ) significantly less than Generation X and Baby boomers. Television is an important source of news for all generational groups, and by far the most important one for Baby boomers. Unlike comparative studies have found, Millennials do not consume printed newspapers significantly less than older generations. They are, however, significantly more avid social media consumers ( $\chi^2=110,2$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Social media represent the most important news source for them. Another significant difference between generations is in their use of digital editions of newspapers. These are used the most by Generation X ( $\chi^2=8,57$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p < .05$ , while television and radio news, digital editions and websites are used more by Millennials ( $\chi^2=11,98$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 2. Percentage of audiences using different platforms as news source

Television news bulletins or programs	Radio news bulletins or programs	Printed newspapers	Websites/apps of newspapers	Website/apps of television or radio companies	Other news websites	Social media
Millennials						
67,6%	21%	41%	56,3%	33,2%	45,8%	69,7%
Generation X						
75,3%	23,9%	43%	62,8%	30,9%	59%	56%
Baby boomers						
80%	33%	42,1%	55,7%	25%	49,5%	41,1%

## LATENT CLASS ANALYSIS

Latent class analysis is a person-oriented statistical technique used to determine 'classes' or clusters of subjects depending on their shared traits (Collins and Lanza, 2010). In that way, it is possible to define latent categories of behavior, preferences or attitudes, by calculating likelihood of subjects to have these traits. For example, it has been used to identify types of alcohol consumption among youth (experimenting, thrill seeking, relaxing) based on behavior or motivations of subjects (Collins and Lanza, 2010: 5). It is similar to factor analysis but does not result in interval variables which represent latent dimensions. It results in categorical variables which refer to the 'qualitative differences between groups of people' (Ruscio and Ruscio, 2008, as quoted in Collins and Lanza, 2010: 6). As it seeks similarities or correlations between respondents based on selected variables, it resembles cluster analysis as well. However, while cluster analysis groups respondents into fixed categories, latent class analysis allows fuzzy or latent groups, so respondents can have multiple probabilities of their membership of certain classes (Collins and Lanza, 2010). The number of classes or groups of respondents in LCA is determined according to goodness of fit criteria. Commonly used are the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) and Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC). The AIC and BIC determine the number of classes based on model fit and parsimony, whereas "a smaller value represents a more optimal balance of model fit and parsimony; thus, a model with the minimum AIC or BIC might be selected" (Collins and Lanza, 2010: 88). The BIC was confirmed to be a better indicator for determining the number of classes than AIC and is more often used as the goodness of fit criterium (Collins and Lanza, 2010). Latent class analysis was conducted with the R software, by means of the package poLCA, for defining news repertoires. Twenty-six variables representing different news sources were used for LCA. Besides these media use variables, theoretically defined covariates capable of shaping the structure of classes (repertoires) were introduced to the analysis. These covariates were gender, generations, income, education, political leaning, political news interest and news trust.

## RESULTS: TYPOLOGY OF DIGITAL NEWS REPERTOIRES

Before determining the structure of latent classes, the number of latent classes or groups must be determined according to statistical criteria. The model was run several times, starting with the model of two classes and gradually increasing the number of classes to analyze the fitness of the model. The recommended coefficient for assessing the model is the BIC, with the lowest value indicating the model with the best fit. In this analysis, the BIC was the lowest in the five-class model (see Table 3 below). The five-class model is also more parsimonious and easier to interpret, which amounts to the additional criteria recommended for the decision on the number of classes (Collins and Lanza, 2010). Therefore, the five-class model was chosen, which also corresponds to some solutions of news repertoires given in previous analyses (as Strömbäck *et al.*, 2018 also notice).

Table 3. LCA goodness of fit criteria for the number of classes

	AIC	BIC
Two-class model	44670.36	44996.07
Three-class model	44205.02	44717.62
Four-class model	43901.75	44601.23
Five-class model	43666.99	<b>44553.35</b>
Six-class model	43486.25	44559.5
Seven-class model	<b>43303.72</b>	44563.85

Five latent classes were labeled according to predominant news sources corresponding to these classes: 'minimalists', 'digital-born users', 'traditionalists', 'commercial media users' and 'eclectics'. Characteristics of latent classes are presented in Table 4., which shows the probabilities of using a certain news source for each latent class, as well as in the text below. The relationship of classes with covariates is presented in Table 5. which demonstrates how socio-demographic variables structure news repertoires. The composition of news repertoires could be drawn through the axis traditional/digital and omnivorous/univore consumption, as news consumption mostly differs according to the orientation towards traditional or digital media or a wider or narrower range of sources for consumption. Bos *et al.*'s study (2016) of news repertoires in the Netherlands establishes that public television cuts across them. In this sample, public media do not hold a similar 'unifying' role in news repertoires. However, although audiences are fragmented according to sources of news, there is more than a 50% probability that they will turn to popular (commercial) television channels for news across almost all news repertoires, except minimalists who are less likely to turn to television news. Other 'unifying forces' among different news repertoires are *Facebook* as a gateway to other news sites and the digital-born media outlet *Index.hr*. This finding is in accordance with research which suggests that audiences, although fragmented, tend to choose known and popular media rather than new and niche media (Nelson and Taneja, 2018). The following text will describe characteristics of each news repertoire, in order of their audience size.

Table 4. The likelihood of using a certain media for news consumption across five repertoires

News repertoire (predicted class membership)	Minimalists (32%)	Traditionalists (23%)	Commercial media users (19%)	Digital- born users (14%)	Eclectics (12%)
<i>RTL</i>	0,45	0,54	0,73	0,64	0,88
<i>Nova tv</i>	0,46	0,64	0,72	0,59	0,91
<i>N1</i>	0,04	0,22	0,03	0,21	0,26
<i>HTV</i>	0,27	0,72	0,46	0,40	0,73
<i>HR</i>	0,19	0,49	0,27	0,24	0,58
<i>Otvoreni radio</i>	0,19	0,12	0,34	0,30	0,44
<i>Narodni radio</i>	0,12	0,09	0,32	0,09	0,41
<i>Antena radio</i>	0,08	0,10	0,17	0,15	0,32
<i>Večernji list</i>	0,07	0,38	0,22	0,05	0,58
<i>Jutarnji list</i>	0,11	0,54	0,24	0,23	0,69
<i>24 sata</i>	0,19	0,29	0,70	0,11	0,73
<i>Vijesti.hrt.hr</i>	0,03	0,20	0,14	0,07	0,46
<i>Dnevnik.hr</i>	0,16	0,34	0,56	0,37	0,87
<i>Vijesti.rtl.hr</i>	0,05	0,13	0,24	0,19	0,54
<i>Slobodnadalmacija.hr</i>	0,14	0,11	0,08	0,25	0,35
<i>Večernji.hr</i>	0,18	0,58	0,29	0,92	0,85
<i>Jutarnji.hr</i>	0,09	0,46	0,21	0,68	0,79
<i>24sata.hr</i>	0,32	0,37	0,78	0,71	0,90
<i>Telegram.hr</i>	0,07	0,07	0,12	0,48	0,44
<i>Index.hr</i>	0,41	0,49	0,56	0,91	0,89
<i>Net.hr</i>	0,25	0,34	0,46	0,63	0,79
<i>Tportal.hr</i>	0,15	0,36	0,39	0,75	0,85
<i>Dnevno.hr</i>	0,06	0,25	0,23	0,27	0,58
<i>Direktno.hr</i>	0,04	0,19	0,14	0,14	0,38
<i>Youtube</i>	0,19	0,30	0,34	0,24	0,51
<i>Facebook</i>	0,50	0,52	0,73	0,52	0,72

*Minimalists* have the narrowest news diet, the lowest probabilities of using media as sources of news. The prevalence of users with lower news use (either labeled as 'news avoiders' or 'minimalists') is shown in previous research (e.g. in Bos et al., Edgerly et al., 2015, 2018, Lee and Yang, 2014, Strömbäck et al., 2018). The largest share of digital news users in Croatia is also likely to belong to this category (32%). They are oriented mostly towards social media and commercial television channels. As the relationship with covariates is calculated as logistic regression, minimalists serve as a reference category to which all

other repertoires are contrasted to. Minimalists are the category with the lowest interest in political news compared to all other categories (see Table 5). These news consumers are younger than traditionalist and digital-born users, but do not differ significantly from commercial media users and eclectics. Therefore, among Millennials there is a greater likelihood of minimalists and commercial users to be found.

*Traditionalists* are the second largest group (23%) who use more media sources than minimalists, although, overall, they have a less diverse news media diet compared to other groups. They focus strongly on public and commercial television and are, compared to all other groups, more likely to consume daily newspapers and printed news magazines, not substituting these traditional sources as more digitally oriented users. Public television and radio have an important position in their news repertoire. When it comes to digital media, they navigate to digital editions of traditional media. These users differ significantly from minimalists in their characteristics. Compared to minimalists, they are more likely to be male, more educated, more right-wing leaning and with a higher interest in political news. They are also more likely to belong to Generation X or Baby boomers' generation.

*Commercial media users* (19% of digital news consumers are likely to belong to this group) also have a slightly narrower repertoire of news sources. They tend to focus on commercial television channels and tabloids in their printed or digital form. Social media hold an important position in their news repertoire, and they are more likely to consume news from commercial radio stations. These are younger and less educated audiences that have a slightly higher interest in political news and higher trust in news compared to minimalists.

*Digital-born users* (14%) focus mainly on digital media sources, although they have not abandoned traditional media. These are the strongest consumers of certain digital-born media brands and digital editions of news dailies. They focus on television but share with minimalists the lowest probability of informing themselves from print media. Although, unlike minimalists, they fill this gap with digital media, they do not consume such a wide array of digital news as eclectics. Their news choice is more selective and certain quality news brands have a relatively important position in their repertoire. These users have a higher probability of belonging to Generation X, have a slightly higher income, and are politically more left-wing leaning and interested in news about politics than minimalists.

*Eclectics* are the smallest (12%) group of users with an omnivorous news media diet, combining traditional and digital, lighter and more serious news sources. They are strong users of digital and social media, but without abandoning traditional sources. These users do not differ from minimalists in most of the socio-demographic characteristics. Interest in political news and higher trust in news is the strongest covariate of this news repertoire. However, it is unclear if this eclecticism can be defined necessarily as higher sophistication in news consumption. Highest trust in news could also point to a lack of critical thinking and news literacy. These users have the highest probability of using *Dnevno.hr*, a digital-born media outlet which tends to publish a mix of sensationalism, misinformation and

bizarre content.<sup>5</sup> Jacob L. Nelson and Harsh Taneja (2018) found that the misinformation audiences in the USA are heavy digital media users who, besides popular media outlets, also choose niche media and fake news sites. On the other hand, similar omnivorous repertoire found in the USA is peculiar in terms of its socio-demographic profile and seems to cut across the ideological poles (Edgerly, 2015). The authors suggest that there may be some personality traits which explain this repertoire, like open-mindedness, which make them more prone to explore news from various sources (Edgerly, 2015: 15).

Table 5. Socio-demographic and political interest covariates predicting news repertoires

	Digital-born users/ Minimalists	Traditionalists/ Minimalists	Commercial users/ Minimalists	Eclectics/ Minimalists
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Intercept	-8,01 (1,5)	-7,80 (1,3)	-0,84 (0,94)	-6,75 (1,02)
Gender	-0,25 (0,23)	-0,90 (0,23) ***	0,15 (0,24)	-0,06 (0,24)
Generation X	2,02 (0,47) ***	1,16 (0,39) **	-0,08 (0,26)	0,15 (0,3)
Baby boomers	1,53 (0,47) **	1,53 (0,37) ***	-1,23 (0,31) ***	-0,35 (0,3)
Income	0,07 (0,02) **	0,02 (0,02)	-0,03 (0,02)	0 (0,03)
Education	0,07 (0,09)	0,21 (0,09) *	-0,33 (0,09) ***	0,04 (0,08)
Political leaning	-0,33 (0,09) ***	0,21 (0,07) **	0,25 (0,07) **	0,14 (0,08)
Political news interest	0,74 (0,13) ***	0,9 (0,14) ***	0,53 (0,12) ***	1,32 (0,13) ***
News trust	0,14 (0,11)	0,14 (0,11)	0,27 (0,11) *	0,40 (0,11) ***

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article builds on the growing research on news repertoires and seeks to explore patterns of news consumption primarily across generations. Research which deals with implications of news media use, and especially news repertoires, has so far mostly been undertaken in rich and developed media environments. News repertoires research in different media environments discovered a certain type of minimal media users, which tends to be the largest group of news consumers. Traditional media users, digital media users and omnivore or eclectic users are also found in different media environments. There are serious democratic implications of such trends. As media environments become more diversified and offer more choice, selectivity of consumers plays an increasingly important role in creating strong divides in news consumption. Age, socioeconomic

<sup>5</sup> So far, there has not been an extensive analysis of misinformation in Croatia. Croatia does not have a list of misinformation sites, like *OpenSources* in the USA (Nelson and Taneja 2018). *OpenSources* is managed by a research team which classifies news sources into 'fake', 'satire', 'hate' and 'clickbait' (Nelson and Taneja, 2018: 3725). However, *Dnevno.hr* has a recorded history of spread of misinformation. *The Croatian Journalist Association's Council of Honor* often publishes reactions to *Dnevno.hr* spread of misinformation and hate speech. Several stories from this news site have been debunked by the fact-checking website *Faktograf.hr* (false information and various conspiracy theories concerning vaccination, migrations and international organizations).

status and especially political interest turn out to be increasingly important factors for driving the selection of news (Bergström *et al.*, 2019). This would mean that with time there are more and more citizens who disconnect from the public sphere, leaving only citizens highly interested in politics being more engaged.

This research has mostly confirmed trends found in other media environments. Out of the five news repertoires discovered ('minimalists', 'digital-born users', 'traditionalists', 'commercial media users' and 'eclectics'), minimalists are the group to which the largest share of citizens are likely to belong to. Belonging to minimalists is mostly driven by generational belonging and interest in political news. This finding is in accordance with previous research which found that audiences with low news use (minimalists or news avoiders) are a growing group of users (Blekesaune *et al.*, 2012; Prior, 2007; Strömbäck *et al.*, 2018) and that age (Bergström *et al.*, 2019) and especially motivational factors, such as interest in politics, play a more important role in environments with abundant media supply (Strömbäck *et al.*, 2013). Millennials are most likely to consume news in a manner of minimalists – having the poorest news diet and being oriented mostly towards social media and commercial television channels as sources of news. Millennial audiences access news slightly less. They are somewhat less interested in news and news about politics, have lower trust in news and express a slightly higher concern about fake news. Commercial media users are also more likely to be younger. They engage with fewer sources of news, and focus on social media, commercial television channels, radio and tabloids. These users are less educated but have higher interest in political news and news trust than minimalists.

On the opposite side of minimalists, there are consumers with the highest interest in political news who consume a wide range of news. Eclectics are news seekers who combine traditional and digital, lighter and more serious news sources, and are heavy users of social media. This smallest group of news users shows that social media do not necessarily produce 'filter bubbles' but are also able to expand the news choice for those with high political interest. Unfortunately, this analysis was not able to evaluate what sort of engagement with news these users have. Are they 'news snackers' who consume fast and fragmented bits of information (Diehl *et al.*, 2018), are they 'heavy digital users' who uncritically consume also misinformation (Nelson and Taneja, 2018) or 'open-minded news seekers' engaging with different information sources (Edgerly, 2015)? These users are more difficult to define in terms of socio-demographic characteristics. They do not significantly differ from minimalists in any socio-demographic characteristic, which would suggest that they are also younger users. They are not significantly more educated than minimalists, but they are significantly driven by motivational factors – they are more interested and have higher trust in news. This is certainly a news repertoire which is worth further exploration in future research.

Generation X and Baby boomers are more likely to be traditionalists and digital-born news users. These users are more politically defined – traditionalists lean to the political right, while digital-born news users lean to the left. It is well known that citizens become more politically interested with age (Norris, 2003), which explains stronger

identifications with political ideologies. Digital-born users have a slightly larger income, while traditionalists are more educated. Both these groups have higher interest in news about politics compared to minimalists.

Audiences in Croatia are clearly fragmented. However, some media cut across news repertoires groups – popular television channels, *Facebook* and digital-born *Index.hr* are likelier to be consumed by various types of digital news audiences. Unlike certain Western Europe countries in which public media unify the fragmented public sphere (Bos *et al.*, 2016), this is not the case with the public media in Croatia. They are likelier to be consumed by traditionalists and eclectics, rather than by other groups of consumers. Previous research found that Croatian public media attract more right-wing audiences instead of ideologically diverse citizens (Peruško and Vozab, 2017). Besides the challenge of being more politically inclusive, the public media will have to tackle the challenge of attracting younger audiences and minimalists to serve in public interest.

There are several limitations to this research. The analysis focuses on survey data representative of Internet users who consume news. For this reason, the analyzed sample might be skewed to represent more affluent, educated and interested audiences than the general population. The questionnaire was designed to collect self-reported media use from respondents, which is problematic as audiences tend to overstate their media use, especially that which is perceived as socially desirable. Finally, news consumption is important for its interaction with political knowledge or participation as indices of active and informed citizenship. Unfortunately, these variables were not present in the analyzed sample. This kind of analysis is therefore left for of future research.

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# GENERACIJSKI OBRASCI KONZUMACIJE DIGITALNIH VIJESTI: OD TRADICIONALISTA DO MILENIJSKIH MINIMALISTA

Dina Vozab

**SAŽETAK** *Digitalno okruženje visokog izbora (Prior, 2007; Van Aelst i sur., 2017) dovodi do fragmentirane i polarizirane konzumacije vijesti. Pojam informativnih repertoara uveden je kako bi se analizirale medijske upotrebe u krosmedijskom okruženju. Otkriveni su raznoliki informativni repertoari u različitim zemljama, ovisno o dobi i socioekonomskom statusu, koji utječu na političko znanje i participaciju (Diehl i sur., 2018; Edgerly i sur., 2018; Strömbäck i sur., 2018; Wolfsfeld i sur., 2016). Cilj ovog istraživanja jest identificirati različite informativne repertoare u Hrvatskoj i testirati učinke generacijske pripadnosti i socioekonomskog statusa na formiranje tih repertoara. Pokazalo se s vremenom da su dob i politički interes važniji prediktori sve raznolikije i polariziranije konzumacije vijesti (Bergström i sur., 2019; Strömbäck i sur., 2013). Ova studija raspravlja o međuodnosu između sociodemografskih faktora i političkog interesa u oblikovanju konzumacije vijesti među različitim generacijama. Analiza se temelji na podacima iz istraživanja Reuters Digital News Survey provedenog u Hrvatskoj 2018. godine. Analiza latentnih klasa s kovarijatima koji ih oblikuju korištena je za identifikaciju informativnih repertoara. Analiza je rezultirala identifikacijom pet informativnih repertoara: minimalist, korisnici digitalnih medija, tradicionalisti, korisnici komercijalnih medija i eklektici.*

## KLJUČNE RIJEČI

PUBLIKE, FRAGMENTACIJA, INFORMATIVNI REPERTOARI, GENERACIJE, POLITIČKI INTERES

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